



# State of Connecticut

## Office of Consumer Counsel

**Mary J. Healey**  
*Consumer Counsel*

**The Energy and Technology Committee**  
**March 10, 2009**

### **S.B. 1101, AAC Coordination of Low-Income Energy Programs**

#### **Testimony of Mary J. Healey, Consumer Counsel**

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) has carefully reviewed and has concerns about S.B. No. 1101, An Act Concerning Coordination of Low Income Energy Programs.

OCC notes that the proposed bill is entitled "Coordination of Low-Income Energy Programs," but the bill is unclear on what it means by "coordination." The bill does not appear to be consolidating any of the current low-income programs. OCC would support greater coordination among the Department of Public Utility Control, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Policy and Management, Operation Fuel, etc. and would be glad to work toward that goal. In that way, we could better reach more low-income energy consumers, including those whose concern is making payments for fuel oil. The bill as written focuses on reaching a discounted rate for gas and electric utilities but does not address oil.

OCC has some concerns about the proposal in the bill to craft a discounted rate program for low-income customers that would be paid for by other ratepayers, as described in Section 1 and particularly Section 1(c) of the bill. Additional incremental costs of such a program may force some low-income and middle-income customers who are keeping up with their bills now into the unfortunate position where they can no longer continue to make timely payments. OCC notes that expenses of uncollectible bills are already paid for by the general class of ratepayers, as are expenses of arrearage forgiveness and matching payment plan programs for low-income customers. Accordingly, OCC would request, if this bill goes forward, that the impact of any discounted rate be as limited for the general class of ratepayers as possible. One way to accomplish this expense mitigation approach would be to maximize use of any federal funding available to low-income customers, including funding for energy efficiency and weatherization. OCC would be happy to work with other stakeholders on those issues as well.